

October 9, 1998

# Drug Disaster

## Under Clinton, the Drug Problem's Getting Worse and Worse

The remarkable progress made during the Reagan Era of "Just Say No" has been supplanted by rapid reversals in the Clinton Era of "I Wish I Had Inhaled."

While historians will remember that it was in June 1992 that Bill Clinton went on MTV and said that he wished that he had inhaled when he tried marijuana for the first time, America's parents long for the days of yore, since they now face the drug war and its subsequent casualties at home every night.

### Youth Drug Use Continues its Deadly Rise on Clinton's Watch

According to the most recent annual National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (issued in August) by the Health and Human Service Department (HHS), youth drug use has continued its annual climb under President Clinton.

- During 1997, 11.4 percent of America's children (more than 2.5 million), ages 12 to 17, reported **recent use of an illicit drug** — including marijuana, cocaine, inhalants, hallucinogens (PCP, LSD), heroin, and the non-medical use of any psychotherapeutic (stimulants, sedatives, etc.) drug. This is a stunning *27-percent increase* in just one year.

This upward trend under Clinton is a sharp reversal from the Reagan-Bush years. Again, according to HHS, the recent-illegal-drug-use figure was experiencing consistent annual declines from its 1979 peak of 16.3 percent; falling all the way to 5.3 percent in 1992. But then, in a span of five years, all on the Clinton Administration's watch, more than half of that hard-won progress has been lost. This loss is not measured in dollars and cents, but in lives lost to the scourge of drugs. Since Clinton assumed leadership on the so-called war on drugs, more than one million additional young teenagers have reported recent illicit drug use.

- The rate of increase of **marijuana use** by 12-to-17-year-olds is alarming. Compared to 1992's historic low of 3.4 percent, the most recent figure of 9.4 percent of young people reporting recent use of marijuana reflects a three-fold increase in five years.
- The rate of increase in **cocaine use** is equally stunning. More than three times as many 12-to-17-year-olds reported recent use of cocaine in 1997 as they did in 1992.

Last year alone, the rate of cocaine use among that age group increased by 67 percent, while the use of crack cocaine doubled.

- Probably worst of all, the drug war is now claiming victims among the youngest of our nation's children. The greatest percentage increase of recent illicit drug use is seen among 12 and 13-year-olds. The *one-year increase was 73 percent*. Among 16 and 17-year-olds, use increased 23 percent. And use of marijuana by 12 and 13-year-olds more than doubled last year, compared to 1996.

## **Administration Not Helping, May Be Hurting Anti-Drug Efforts**

In the last year, this Administration has ignored the plight of our nation's most at-risk population for drug addiction. Instead of protecting our borders from the ever-increasing inflow of illegal narcotics or repeating the very successful message of the 1980's "just say no" to drugs, this Administration appears instead to be taking steps to make drug use easier and less costly in some communities.

In April of 1998, HHS Secretary Donna Shalala took the necessary first steps toward providing illegal-drug abusers with taxpayer-subsidized syringes in announcing the Administration's determination that needle exchange programs (envisioned to combat HIV infection) "will not encourage the use of illegal drugs." [For details on this policy, see RPC paper, "Administration Endorses Free Needles for Addicts," 4/22/98]. How can the Administration say with conviction that an increase in needle exchange programs won't result in some of the neighborhood kids not becoming exposed to, if not hooked on, illegal drugs?

Why isn't this Administration instead working to win the war on drugs, not promoting programs that put more obstacles in the way of victory?

## **Putting Children First: The Republican Response**

Republicans, on the other hand, offered a strong comprehensive, anti-drug program as an amendment during the debate on the tobacco policy bill (a bill which, as reported, addressed youth anti-smoking provisions but didn't address anti-drug provisions). The amendment, called the "Drug-Free Neighborhoods Act," would have established a program for reducing the real threat to our nation's children — increased teen drug use in America. The anti-drug amendment included four major programs that would reduce teen drug use by: (1) stopping the flow of drugs at our borders; (2) helping to protect our neighborhoods and schools from drugs; (3) increasing resources for law enforcement agencies (the Drug Enforcement Agency and the FBI); and (4) requiring a four-year National Drug Control Strategy at the beginning of every presidential term.

While the Drug-Free Neighborhoods Act passed the Senate, by a vote of 52-46 (RVA #151, June 9, 1998), it did not become law; however, it was anticipated at press time that the omnibus FY99 appropriations bill would include a number of provisions that were in that bill. The provisions likely to become law include:

- ▶ Enhanced U.S. drug interdiction and increased drug eradication and crop substitution efforts;
- ▶ Increased authorizations to reduce teen drug use, including increased spending on an anti-drug media campaign;
- ▶ Authorization of small business demonstration grants to organizations which assist small businesses in implementing drug-free workplace programs;
- ▶ Language opposing the efforts of states to legalize marijuana for medical purposes;
- ▶ Language increasing the penalties on trafficking in methamphetamine to correspond to the penalties applicable to crack cocaine; and
- ▶ Reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy to require the Administration to strive for significant reductions in drug use.

The bully pulpit was an apt tool in previous Administrations' efforts to fight the war on drugs. Can this President ever be able to credibly use it?

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